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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 KATHMANDU 001290

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS AND DS/IP/NEA  
STATE ALSO PLEASE PASS USAID/DCHA/OFDA  
STATE ALSO PLEASE PASS PEACE CORPS HQ  
STATE ALSO PLEASE PASS TO DOL/VROZENBERGS  
USAID FOR ANE/AA GORDON WEST AND JIM BEVER  
MANILA FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA  
LONDON FOR POL/GURNEY  
TREASURY FOR GENERAL COUNSEL/DAUFHAUSER AND DAS JZARATE  
TREASURY ALSO FOR OFAC/RNEWCOMB AND TASK FORCE ON TERRORIST  
FINANCING  
JUSTICE FOR OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL/DLAUFMAN  
NSC FOR MILLARD  
SECDEF FOR OSD/ISA ALVERSON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PINS PHUM](#) [PTER MOPS](#) [PGOV NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

REFERENCE: (A) 02 KATHMANDU 2307

(B) 03 KATHMANDU 2129

(C) KATHMANDU 722

(D) KATHMANDU 1056

(E) KATHMANDU 999

SUMMARY

1. Nepal's Maoist insurgency, which began in 1996, has tragically victimized the children of Nepal. The frequent school bandhs (school closings), have disrupted the lives of students, parents and teachers and the scheduling of required exams, damaged the educational system and delayed the advancement of children. The unregulated and rampant violence in the outlying districts has also been driving many youth to seek refuge in the cities and in India -- further fueling preconditions for trafficking in persons. Children have not only witnessed countless acts of violence, but have also been victims themselves. Many others have been orphaned, displaced, harassed, detained and interrogated by parties on both sides. The Maoist leadership denies using child soldiers, but intensified Maoist recruitment campaigns have resulted in thousands of children being forcibly rounded up to take part in "cultural" or "indoctrination" programs for the so-called People's War. During these campaigns, children receive a modicum of military training, and local press reports indicate that many of them receive grenades and guns and instructions on how to use them against security forces. Though the pattern of forced recruitment of children is widely known, political instability and lack of security, particularly in the remote districts, makes it increasingly difficult to document, monitor and prevent the use of children in the conflict. End Summary.

CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

2. According to statistics from the Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Center (CWIN), a local NGO dealing with children's rights, 298 noncombatant children have been killed, 193 have been injured, over 2,000 orphaned, and more than 8,000 displaced since the beginning of the insurgency in 1996. Similar statistics from the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), a local human rights organization, suggest that between February 1996 and June 2004, 276 children (191 boys, 85 girls), from the ages of one to 17, were killed in the conflict. Of these 276, INSEC believes that 161 were killed by state security forces and 115 by Maoists. The majority of these killings occurred in the mid- and far western districts of Nepal, although no region has avoided child casualties. The statistics available on child casualties are somewhat ambiguous, as they are not categorized by cause of death. Murders, bombings and accidental crossfire all contribute to this number, but the extent of each is unknown. INSEC also cites multiple cases of injury, arrest and torture, disappearance, beatings, threats and abduction carried out against children by both the Maoists and the state. (NOTE: The exact number of children affected is impossible to quantify, however, and the bulk of statistics must be taken from newspaper accounts, which are often inaccurate. END NOTE.)

3. Recently, a noticeable increase in the number of deaths and injuries of children from stray bombs has occurred. During the months of May and June 2004, for example, of the 13 children killed and 8 injured, 7 of the deaths and 7 of the injuries were caused by bombs. These deaths occurred both as collateral damage during fighting between the security forces and the Maoists, during the bombing of

public conveyances, and-even more often-as a result of children picking up unexploded ordinance in the aftermath of an attack.

#### MAOIST RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN

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14. Despite the Maoists' frequent public statements of support for Geneva Conventions and respect for human rights, some comments by their leadership betray the actual ruthlessness of the movement. For example, in April a vernacular paper quoted Maoist chairman Prachanda as saying that the Maoists intended to use youths and villagers as "human shields" during a "big attack" in eastern Nepal "sometime in the next two or three months" (REF D). According to a report in the April 16-22 edition of "The Nepali Times," local Maoists have not tried to hide their campaign to recruit children. In March, Kamal Shahi of the Maoists' student wing told a gathering in the western district of Banke, "We will be victorious in our people's war, and for that we will raise a 50,000 strong force of child soldiers." The militia units for which the Maoists are recruiting children are the lowest rung of the people's army. The Maoist leadership justifies these recruitments by charging that since the army has "been killing schoolchildren," children need to be trained for "self-protection." Another Maoist-affiliated student meeting in January concluded, "To guarantee their education, school children have no alternative but armed resistance." The slogan for this campaign is "One School, One Strong Militia." In addition to militia, children are recruited to serve various support functions and work as cooks, couriers, porters, members of cultural teams and informants.

15. In an attempt to win over students, Maoists have used schools for parades and drills, as well as venues to host "cultural programs." The themes of the various cultural and indoctrination programs involve slogans such as "defeat imperialism," and "fight exploitation, suppression, and atrocities." A news article featuring interviews with students (aged 10-14) after their release from Maoist training sessions quoted the students as saying they "couldn't understand the meaning of revolution" and "participated in the programs only because they [the Maoists] threatened physical action against those who did not attend" (REF D). Not only do these demonstrations on school premises scare children, they also put them at risk, most spectacularly in the October 2003 incident at a secondary school in Doti District in which four students were killed by RNA soldiers (REF B). In a subsequent interview with the press, one of the injured students was quoted as saying, "We raised our hands and told the army we are just students, but they started firing. If the Maoists had not forced us to attend the program, my friends would be alive today."

16. Still, some children appear to be joining the ranks of the Maoist militia willingly. An article that appeared in the October 4-10, 2002 edition of "The Nepali Times," reported that a 14-year-old boy, Chetnath Dhakal, was persuaded to join the ranks of the Maoist militia after seeing another 14-year-old from his village with a gun. Another youth, Krishna Prasad, who joined the Maoists when he was in grade seven, is now a commander of local child soldiers in his area. In the far-western districts of Jumla and Dang, it is reportedly not uncommon to see children dressed in military uniforms carrying grenades, bombs and guns. A ten-year-old girl, carrying two grenades, is quoted in one article proudly saying that her job is to sit by the side of the road and wait for security forces to come. Another soldier, an eleven-year-old girl, said "when we grow up we will take part in attacks on Royal Nepal Army bases" (REF C).

17. Also alarming are the accounts of large numbers of students being forcibly rounded up by the Maoists for indoctrination programs. A report released by Amnesty International on May 26, 2004, put Nepal at the top of the list for disappearances during 2003 (REF E). In May of this year, over 3200 people were rounded up (the vast majority students). In June, this number more than doubled, to 7300. A local news source on June 29 reported Maoist training of 4,000 youths in Dailekh district. A security source acknowledged awareness of the training, adding that a helicopter had been flown into the region but no air raid was conducted due to the large number of civilians in the area. Although most individuals are returned after attending indoctrination sessions, an unknown number continue to be held captive.

#### SECURITY FORCES ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT

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18. The Maoists are not alone in their exploitation of children; both the army and Maoists use children as informants. In one incident in northeastern Dolakha district, Maoists rounded up 200 children -- the entire

population of a primary school -- and marched them to an unknown location in the jungle. There they were questioned about the movement of security forces. In that case, the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) had previously been using the school building as a barracks. NGOs have also stated that children who have left the Maoists and reported to "surrender camps" run by the RNA have been forced to return repeatedly to their villages to identify former comrades or units, and to report on insurgent movements. Obviously, this creates serious risk of retaliation by the insurgents. NGOs also report that children have been beaten by military and police personnel during interrogation (REF A).

#### NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

19. In an effort to document the abuse of children, NGOs like CWIN and INSEC have attempted to obtain accurate statistics over the past few years on the number of children abducted, killed, beaten, and displaced, based on reporting in the media. [NOTE: The Government itself, with its limited presence outside Kathmandu and major city centers, does not collect such statistics, relying largely on NGOs for information and monitoring. The newspapers from which NGOs gather most of their data, however, are extremely limited in their ability to produce comprehensive reports. Most districts do not have local newspapers, and journalists from larger cities rarely travel to the rural areas in which the Maoists are most active. END NOTE.] From June to August of 2003, while the last ceasefire was in effect, INSEC sent a team of researchers to the eastern district of Sindhuli to conduct interviews on the impact of the conflict on women and children. Because Maoists use children in a number of capacities (as couriers, cooks, porters, informants, members of cultural teams, shields and as soldiers), it is difficult to ascertain the number of children involved in the Maoist militia. One reporter who visited the western district of Rolpa in April noted he had met many Maoists who appeared to be under 15, but when asked they all said they were 18. Some commentators also question whether organizations like CWIN and INSEC, with their clear leftist funding and sentiments, are interested in balanced reporting of human rights violations.

10. CWIN has set up an advocacy campaign for children, "Children as Zones of Peace," as well as a rehabilitation center for child survivors of armed conflict. Shanti Griha, "Peace Home," provides educational support, health, peace education, and psycho-social counseling. Following the decision by the Government of Nepal to remove the ANNISU-R student organization from the list of terrorist organizations, and the reopening of schools on June 18, on June 23 the Minister for Education and Sports, Bimalendra Nidhi, stated that the Ministry would soon examine ways to formalize the concept of making the "education sector a zone of peace." It remains unclear at this time, however, the specific plan of action the government intends to undertake to accomplish this goal, or how the Maoists would react to the "zone of peace" concept.

#### RESPONSE OF THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WELFARE

11. When contacted on June 30 for comment on the position of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare on the issue of child soldiers, Joint Secretary Shyam Sundar Sharma responded that the MoWCSW has "no interest" in the topic of child soldiers. According to Sharma, to take such an interest would only create more problems; only members of the international community express an interest in this issue. The MoWCSW has no plans to do anything about the issue of child soldiers in the future, Sharma concluded.

#### COMMENT

12. Though the Maoist leadership continues to deny publicly the recruitment of children, it is clear that children throughout Nepal are being rounded up for use in the so-called "People's War." Young and impressionable, many of these children may be seduced by the illusion of strength and power joining such a militia creates. Others are forced to join due to threats of physical harm to them and their families if they refuse. An especially vulnerable age-group is teenagers; teenagers are actively sought by the Maoists to become soldiers and frequently caught in the crossfire when security forces assume them to be Maoist rebels. The fact that there have been human rights violations on both sides, in addition to the use of schools as barracks and parade grounds, serves to further confuse, intimidate and, ultimately, involve children, whether they like it or not, in the conflict. It is positive that the GON leadership, local NGOs and donors hope to remove the education sector

from the fray of the insurgency. This cannot be accomplished, however, while the Maoists continue to engage in mass abductions of children from schools. The influence Maoist-affiliated student groups, such as the All Nepal National Independent Student Union - Revolutionary (ANNISU-R), have over the educational system also presents a significant challenge. As long as schools are misused as parade grounds, training grounds and battlegrounds, children will continue to be victims in this increasingly bloody conflict.

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